

A HISTORIAN'S VIEW OF HEARST CASTLE

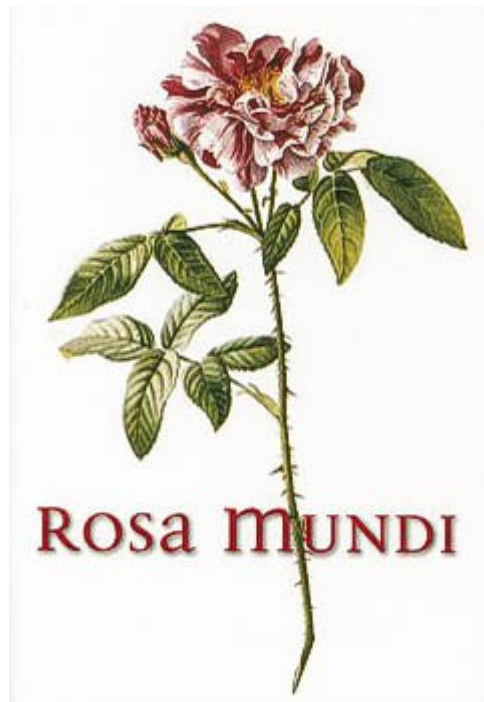
VICTORIA KASTNER *as interviewed by* VIRGINIA KEAN

AND

Restoration of Heritage Roses at Hearst Castle

BY

VIRGINIA KEAN & ERIC WEISS



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In 1977 a young graduate student took a tour of Hearst Castle that transformed her life. Thirty years on, Victoria Kastner, author of Hearst Castle, the Biography of a Country House and the upcoming San Simeon: The Gardens and

the Land, is still captivated by its breathtaking and singular beauty. This article is excerpted from her recent conversation with Virginia Kean.

HEARST HAD AN ARCADIAN VIEW OF California. He was a Westerner, the only child of a pioneer and one of the greatest civic benefactresses in American history. Unlike the frozen easterners and sun-starved mid-westerners who came to California and built bungalows in the Arts and Crafts style, he was a native Californian who was sent to school in the East and spent two and a half decades working there.

Hearst was always homesick for California when he was away from it. He once wrote, “I long to see our own woods, the jagged rocks and towering mountains, the majestic pines . . . I shall never live anywhere but in California.” He and his architect, Julia Morgan, shared similar feelings about this place. Their collaboration was remarkable for its spirit, its duration, and its seeming implausibility. On the surface, they didn’t appear to be anything alike, but they had a deep mutuality of feeling.

When I came to work here in 1979, Julia Morgan was an unknown woman architect, but then this Rosetta Stone of correspondence between Hearst and Morgan came to light. They wrote each other constantly. Morgan saved all 1,000 letters, which are now archived at Cal Poly at San Luis Obispo. Then in 1985, Sara Holmes Boutelle’s biography of Morgan was published. From the time they met in 1903, Morgan became his major architect. She designed and built many things for him—radio towers, zoo enclosures, houses in Southern California—the swimming pool at his castle in Wales, but Hearst Castle was their magnum opus. They both had such a feeling for art and the act of creation. She was self-effacing, and despite his power and wealth, he was personally self-effacing, with a Victorian courtliness. Theirs was a relationship full of passion and love for this place.



TOP LEFT: Aerial view of Hearst Castle. Photo by Victoria Garagliano, © Hearst Castle®, California State Parks. BOTTOM LEFT: Hearst and Morgan reviewing plans. Photo courtesy of Hearst Castle. © Hearst Castle®, California State Parks. ABOVE: Victoria Kastner at one of the doors to the Roman Pool at Hearst Castle. Photo by Virginia Kean.



"I like the roses in all variety of colors and . . . think a profusion and confusion of bloom . . . would be attractive."

—WILLIAM R. HEARST
IN A LETTER TO JULIA MORGAN,
NOVEMBER 26, 1928

Hearst's other major homes included a 12th-century castle with a walled rose garden in Wales, an old 900,000-acre rancho in the north of Mexico, a 30-room 5-story townhouse in New York City, a country house in Long Island on the Hudson, an estate of nearly 100,000 acres of soaring pine forests along a rushing river near California's Mount Shasta, and a property right on the beach in Santa Monica. All had extraordinary settings, but none featured gardens that were on the scale of this. The siting on 450 square miles—275,000 acres—is what's just brilliant here, and the way the natural landscape gives way to the created landscape, and the way the created landscape refers to the setting.

At first there were just snakes, oaks, and laurels. Water was brought down from the mountain springs at higher elevations. Hearst was hugely sensitive to what was already here; he didn't want any oaks uprooted. The initial plan for a very simple bungalow quickly evolved into a scheme of interdependent bungalows with planted areas in between, and a main house, all connected by steps, paths, and terraces. From the start of construction in the fall of 1919 there was always going to be some kind of plantings. Then there was a transitional period when the gardens went from a very Spanish influence into something more sweeping, inspired by Italian Renaissance gardens. As Hearst's vision grew and as the buildings grew in scope and scale, the gardens took on a much more important role and the garden features and small terraces were scaled up. Larger terraces, balustrades, and ceremonial steps were added. This idea of blending things together into a harmonious whole, which Hearst talks about, comes from his realizing that the gardens needed to complement the fantasy architecture of the buildings.

The most wonderful letters Hearst wrote to Morgan are the garden letters. The most fanciful of these were handwritten and may have been composed in the gardens. The fact that he wasn't a plant expert was no impediment. He wanted plants that earned their keep. But what he really wanted were wonderful effects, fragrance, and gardens with both a day and night aspect.

Roses were the first flower he mentions in the letters, and a frequent subject. You could say that the gardens started out as suggestions for the roses. At one point Hearst even wanted to have a maze of climbing roses on lattices because that way you “couldn’t cheat.” He wanted fragrant, repeat-blooming roses and ordered the new Hybrid Teas that were just coming onto the market. Color was important. For the three cottages he suggested pink and white roses around one, red and yellow roses around another, and yellow and orange roses around the third.

In the early 1920s, Hearst brought Bruce Porter in to consult and later hired Isabella Worn, a San Francisco floral designer. She had an excellent sense of color and would go round the garden with him. Hearst got ideas from her but also bargained Morgan with clippings from some of the 14 magazines he owned, among them *House Beautiful*, *Town and Country*, and *Connoisseur*. Charles Platt is another influence in that rather than a Mediterranean garden with mostly greens and citrus, these gardens have a preponderance of colorful, old-fashioned flowers. This was to be a garden of memory, planted in a simple garden style with a real profusion and confusion of flowers. The other big influence on Hearst was his grandparents’ garden in Santa Clara, California.

When I first came here, Hearst was considered the genius behind everything, but the letters and Boutelle’s biography of Morgan countered that. Hearst is the



LEFT: Mme Édouard Herriot. Photo by Ron Robertson. BELOW: A parterre at Hearst Castle. Photo by Mary McDonald. © Hearst Castle®, California State Parks.



generator of ideas and Morgan is creating for him to his taste. The suggestions are nearly always his, but she is responding with her design inspiration. In her designs she's giving him not just what he wants, but what she knows he would want. That's the dynamic between them. It is a rare kind of collaboration that can go on as long as this one did, where the client is of such changeability of mind and yet the architect doesn't take umbrage at that.

Hearst was trying to improve on the past by superimposing this idea of a European landscape that had the best aspects, the cultural beauty and grandeur that he had seen ever since his first trip abroad at the age of ten and that Julia Morgan had also seen. He takes the one deficiency in the California landscape, the lack of culture, and superimposes this European lifestyle of grandeur in architecture. He



Statue of Europa surrounded by roses in a parterre at Casa del Mar, Hearst Castle, December 2007. Photo by Virginia Kean.

takes this rough, unfinished landscape, tends it, makes it self-sufficient, but keeps the unspoiled beauty and the personal freedom of the West.

It's extraordinary that everything now looks the way he envisioned it would look. It's all grown to a level of maturity where the *Washingtonia robusta* palms are dusting the tops of the bell towers. Although there is not the same abundance of plants as in Hearst's time, at the last inventory the gardens contained 1,041 roses. And the views that Hearst so treasured are pretty much the same, despite the enormous pressures for development from the 1960s on that have been resolved with the successful agreement championed by Stephen Hearst, one of Hearst's great-grandsons, and the American Land Conservancy, which will preserve the ranchland from further development.

When I came here in 1979, people laughed with derision that I would come to what many considered a dark, gaudy, horribly excessive place. It was as if I had said I was going to be narrating the jungle ride at Disneyland. Modern architecture, the international style, had been enshrined as the only architecture. There was an anti-Hearst sentiment and nothing had been published about this place. So I was fortunate to arrive when I did. Julia Morgan, who never wrote or

lectured about architecture, thought her buildings would speak for her.

We confer meaning on individual objects because they come freighted with a whole series of extended associations. That's what this house did for Hearst, who was two years old when his father bought the property. The one constant in his childhood was this place, and he was attached to it at the deepest level. I think it was the longest love affair of his life. Hearst was completely unrealistic and quite an exasperating employer. His politics were often controversial and not admirable. But when it comes to the way he felt about the land and landscape, about gardens, art, architecture, and hospitality, he was tremendous. And I think this is the greatest single work by a female architect in the world. With Hearst Castle, Julia Morgan was at the top of her game.

Restoration of Heritage

A Progress Report



Roses at Hearst Castle



Victoria Kastner and Eric Weiss

In April 2008, the Heritage Rose Foundation held its annual conference at Hearst Castle. For two days, attendees strolled among acres of hilltop gardens surrounding three “cottages,” each of which resembles a Mediterranean-style villa, and the imposing main building, known by William Randolph Hearst and his architect Julia Morgan as Casa Grande. Hearst’s formal name for the entire estate was La Cuesta Encantada (The Enchanted Hill), likely because of its fairy-tale setting, sunny climate, and panoramic views of mountains and coastline. Built over 28 years—from 1919 to 1947—it is one of the most dramatic gardens in America. No landscape architect was employed on the project. Instead Hearst and Morgan together determined its layout and plantings.

After Hearst’s death in 1951 and Julia Morgan’s death in 1957, the Hearst Corporation and the Hearst family donated the hilltop property to the state of California. It opened for public tours on June 2, 1958. The Heritage Rose Foundation’s confer-

LEFT: ‘Hinrich Gaede’, a stunning Hybrid Tea introduced by Kordes in 1931

ABOVE: ‘Dr. W. Van Fleet’, a large-flowered Climber bred in the U.S. by Dr. Walter Van Fleet (1910), below the Castle’s north wing (all photos pages 32–41 by Victoria Garagliano/©Hearst Castle®/CA State Parks)



ABOVE: Victoria Kastner, Castle historian and author of *Hearst's San Simeon: The Gardens and the Land* (published in 2009 by Harry N. Abrams)

RIGHT: "Girl with Goat," by Marcel Courbier, circa 1930, with 'Gruss an Aachen'

ence was one of many activities celebrating the Castle's fiftieth anniversary as a California State Park. Additionally, researchers at the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation in Brookline, Massachusetts have collaborated with Castle staff to complete a Cultural Landscape Report guiding the historic restoration of the Castle gardens. This project includes restoring the original rose plantings, an effort that began in 2005. Head groundskeeper Christine Takahashi spoke to conference attendees about the project. Expert rose grafter Burling Leong also detailed her techniques for reproducing the Castle's original tree roses. For this article, we interviewed Christine and Burling to get an update on their efforts to bring historic roses back to the Castle.

Roses were always one of William Randolph Hearst's favorite plants. He was the only child of Senator George Hearst, one of America's most successful gold, silver, and copper miners, and Phoebe Apperson Hearst, one of the country's greatest philanthropists. As a boy, Willie visited his mater-

nal grandparents' garden at their Alviso ranch in the Santa Clara Valley near San Francisco. In her 1934 biography, *William Randolph Hearst American*, author Mrs. Fremont Older described its plantings: "Duchess roses were everywhere, and white and yellow Banksia roses twined themselves round and were visible in pepper and cypress tree-tops. It was a garden that Sonny Hearst never forgot."

Even as a boy, young Willie knew about roses and valued them for their rarity and beauty. The Hearst family residence on Chestnut Street in San Francisco had a large and luxurious garden. The little girl next door, Katherine "Pussy" Soulé, recalled her playmate's invitation: "Come see the 'La France'!", Willie said." Her curiosity piqued, she climbed over the fence to see what this exotic-sounding object might be. "Why, it's just a rose," she exclaimed, disappointed. "It's a 'La France,'" Willie corrected her. He went on to say, "Pussy, if I wasn't afraid my mother would be mad, I'd cut the 'La France' and give it to you."

Hearst's affection for roses continued, as can be seen in his extensive correspondence with Morgan throughout the 1920s and 1930s. They discussed hiring possible landscape architects for San Simeon: either Lockwood de Forest, who worked in Santa Barbara at the time, or Florence Yoch, who created gardens for Hollywood sets, including Tara for *Gone With the Wind*. Hearst employed Isabella Worn, who collabo-

rated with Bruce Porter on Filoli in Woodside, California, as a color consultant. But generally he personally chose the plants and their locations, and Morgan created the garden designs. Hearst wrote to Morgan in February 1921, early in the project: "I think we should have . . . a lot of fine roses. Mrs. Hearst and I are both very fond of roses. I should also like a considerable number of climbing roses either over the front walls of the houses . . . or in the courts. . . . The roses would clothe the courts in a very pretty way, I think."

One of the most memorable sites on the hilltop is the Neptune Pool. In the earliest plans, Hearst envisioned it as a rose garden. He bought the ancient granite columns that eventually formed the pool's temple facade, asking his secretary, Joseph Willicombe, to write to Morgan in July 1922: "I have bought this [the temple fragments] and I thought it might be well to erect it in the rose garden against the trees where we are putting the pergola." Roses were planted extensively from the beginning. Morgan wrote to Hearst in December 1922: "At San Simeon yesterday the day was lovely—heliotrope, jasmine, roses, violets, fuchsias, oranges, and lots of other things, as though it were a May day." Hearst continued to request more roses, including in November 1928, when he asked Morgan for "roses in all variety of colors."

Few historic planting plans for the hilltop currently exist, though researcher Sandra J. Heinemann has documented well over 500 original plant species and cultivars grown in the gardens. We know that Hearst generally selected the biggest, the newest, the showiest, and the most fragrant blossoms for his gardens. He bought roses largely from California nurseries, selecting early Hybrid Teas. Some of the roses grown in the gardens in his time include 'Charlotte Armstrong', 'Christopher Stone', 'Climbing Cécile Brunner', 'Climbing Mme Caroline Testout', 'Comtesse Vandal', 'Condesa de Sástago', 'Étoile de Hollande', 'General MacArthur', 'Golden Emblem', 'Golden Rapture', 'Gruss An Aachen',





'Hinrich Gaede', 'Kaiserin Auguste Viktoria', 'Los Angeles', 'Mrs. Erskine Pembroke Thom', 'Mrs. Sam McGredy', 'President Herbert Hoover', 'Rose Marie', 'Rotary Lyon', 'Sensation', and 'Texas Centennial'. With hundreds of roses in the Castle gardens during Hearst's residence, there were clearly more varieties than these.

In the past five decades, the early Hybrid Teas were gradually replaced with non-historic

TOP: 'Kaiserin Auguste Viktoria', Peter Lambert's 1891 Hybrid Tea

ABOVE: 'Étoile de Hollande', a Hybrid Tea by Verschuren (1919)

RIGHT: 'Climbing Caroline Testout', bred in France by Prof. J. B. Chauvry (1901)

FAR RIGHT TOP: 'The Fairy', a historic rose treated at Hearst Castle as a standard, unusual in that Polyanthas are usually Shrub roses

FAR RIGHT: 'Charlotte Armstrong', a Hybrid Tea by Dr. Walter Lammerts (1940)





roses. In Hearst's era, tree roses (rose standards) were generally planted along the edge of the garden beds, high enough so their fragrance was evident. The beds were outlined in geometric parterres that held bedding plants and bush roses. Tree roses along the edges were interspersed with bush roses. Climbing roses were trained up the palm trees, and planted on trellises against the cottage walls.

Christine continues to oversee the garden restoration and the planting of historic roses. She was studying landscape design at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo when she came on a Castle tour in the 1970s. She happened to see a woman groundskeeper pruning the plants, and thought to herself, "I could do that someday." Now she supervises the

grounds staff of eleven. They are endeavoring to bring more softness and fullness back to the Castle's gardens, as shown in hundreds of historic garden photographs in the Castle's archives. "We are trying not to prune things too hard," she says.

Christine is restoring each site case by case, beginning with the beds around the cottages, the first area to be landscaped in the early 1920s. She is also carefully preserving the few historic roses that we presume are remnants from early days. This coming winter she will plant 94 bush roses and 10 climbing roses from Vintage Gardens Nursery. These plants started small, mostly in liners, and are now in five-gallon containers. Over one hundred tree roses budded by Burling were already planted in January 2008. The total number of roses on order is 550, half of which are already at the Castle. By January of 2011, all the historic roses will be planted. "I'm trying to do as much rose restoration as I can with the money and the labor that we



have,” explains Christine. “My whole grounds crew is on board and very excited about the project.” Drought continues to be a problem. “I will do everything in my power to keep things alive,” she continues. “It’s actually more costly to bring them back than it is to keep them alive with adequate watering.” For funding, she has been assisted by the nonprofit association Friends of Hearst Castle.

In using historic roses, Christine has to consider many factors: color, height, characteristics, condition, drought tolerance, and vigor. “For instance, ‘General Macarthur’ has too much mildew. We will keep it, but not in such huge concentrations.” She works to keep the scale consistent: “A standard rose that shoots up very high or is very lanky would not be a good feature. We’re just getting to know these roses. They are not quite as vigorous. And they are definitely not as disease resistant.” Another challenge is color. “The historic roses are lighter colors, with more pastels. I don’t want the beds to be a mish-mash. We coordinate shades—in one bed we’ll have the paler pinks and yellows, and in another bed, the warmer ranges of orange, apricot, and red.”

Burling began working at Sequoia Nursery with Ralph Moore (known as the King of Miniature Roses) in 1972. She opened Burlington Rose Nursery in Visalia in 2004. When Gregg Lowery of Vintage Gardens in Sebastopol, California, contacted her about helping with the Castle garden restoration, she only had 23 heritage roses at her nursery. “I was so excited to take part in this project,” she said. The late Mel Hulse, one of the directors of the San Jose Heritage Rose Garden, was very helpful to her, as were staff at The Huntington Library in San Marino and many rose growers and volunteers.

In her first batch, Burling came up with a list of 83 varieties in the first planting of tree roses. She is currently growing a total of 263 bush roses, 113 trees roses, and 3 climbing roses. Burling is working with ‘Dr. Huey’ understock, which was the only root stock she could bud onto. It was challenging, since her background was in miniature roses, and these bud eyes were much larger than the ‘Climbing Pink Cloud’ root stock she generally used. “I was so used to budding miniature roses, and now all of a sudden, I was working at a scale that was twenty times as large!”

Burling sees the return of historic roses to Hearst Castle as a potential teaching opportunity. “Roses are not only a reflection of beauty; they are also a reflection of history,” she says. “If we can get young people to look at the tag and learn about the names and the era, we can use the roses to instruct them and give them a way to connect to the place. And get them interested in growing historic roses in the future.”

Looking ahead, Christine envisions a time when the large oaks along the north side of the Esplanade will die out. “It’s a whole circle of life. There used to be rose stan-



LEFT: ‘Climbing Cécile Brunner’

ABOVE: Christine Takahashi, head groundskeeper at Hearst Castle



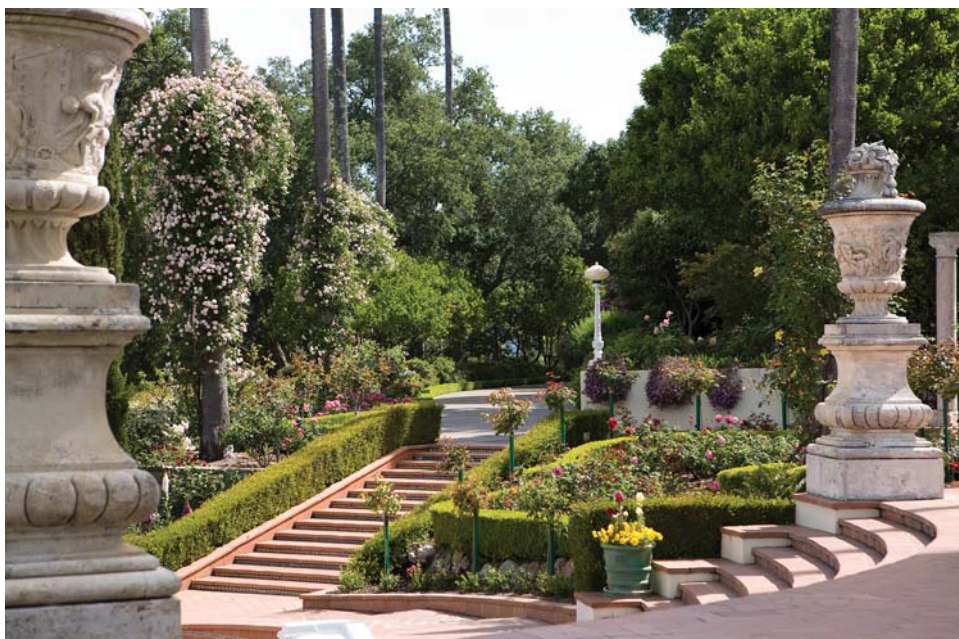
TOP: ‘Blaze’, a climber bred by Joseph W. Kallay in the U.S. in 1932

ABOVE: ‘General MacArthur’, a large-flowered, deep pink Hybrid Tea with a Damask fragrance, bred by E. Gurney Hill Co. in 1904, and named after General Arthur MacArthur (1845–1912), father of General Douglas MacArthur

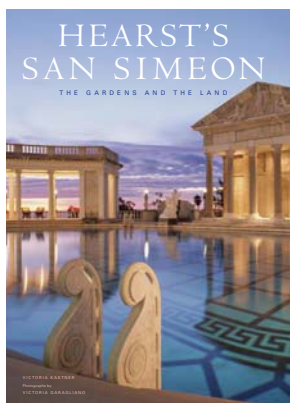
RIGHT: ‘Climbing Cécile Brunner’ scrambling up a palm tree along the Esplanade walk at Hearst Castle

dards along the Azalea Walk, but the oaks have shaded them out. In the distant future when the oaks die, the gardeners will plant historic roses there. Eventually the replanted Coast live oaks will grow large enough to shade them out again. And then the whole cycle will start all over.”

At the midway point in this project, Burling says, “It is all turning out real well. The Castle is beautiful, but without the plants in the landscape, it wouldn’t be half so nice. These heritage roses bring Mr. Hearst’s whole era back to life.” Christine adds, “These roses are very beautiful, and very distinctive. We will always have to replace individual plants, but this project will bring back a very important aspect of the Castle gardens.”



William Randolph Hearst loved roses and loved to replant. We can be sure that he and Julia Morgan would be delighted to have another garden project under way, returning the historic roses to his Enchanted Hill.



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VICTORIA KASTNER is the historian at Hearst Castle, where she has worked for thirty years. She has master's degrees from the University of California at Santa Barbara and from George Washington University in Washington, D.C. She is the author of *Hearst Castle: The Biography of a Country House*, and *Hearst's San Simeon: The Gardens and the Land*, both published by Harry N. Abrams.



ERIC WEISS has worked at Hearst Castle for nearly twenty years. He has a history degree from Fresno State University and a technical degree in nursery management from Cal Poly State University in San Luis Obispo. He trains the guide staff on the history of the Castle gardens, and does private consultations in garden design.